

DRAMA



IRIGON DRAMA

Winter 1908



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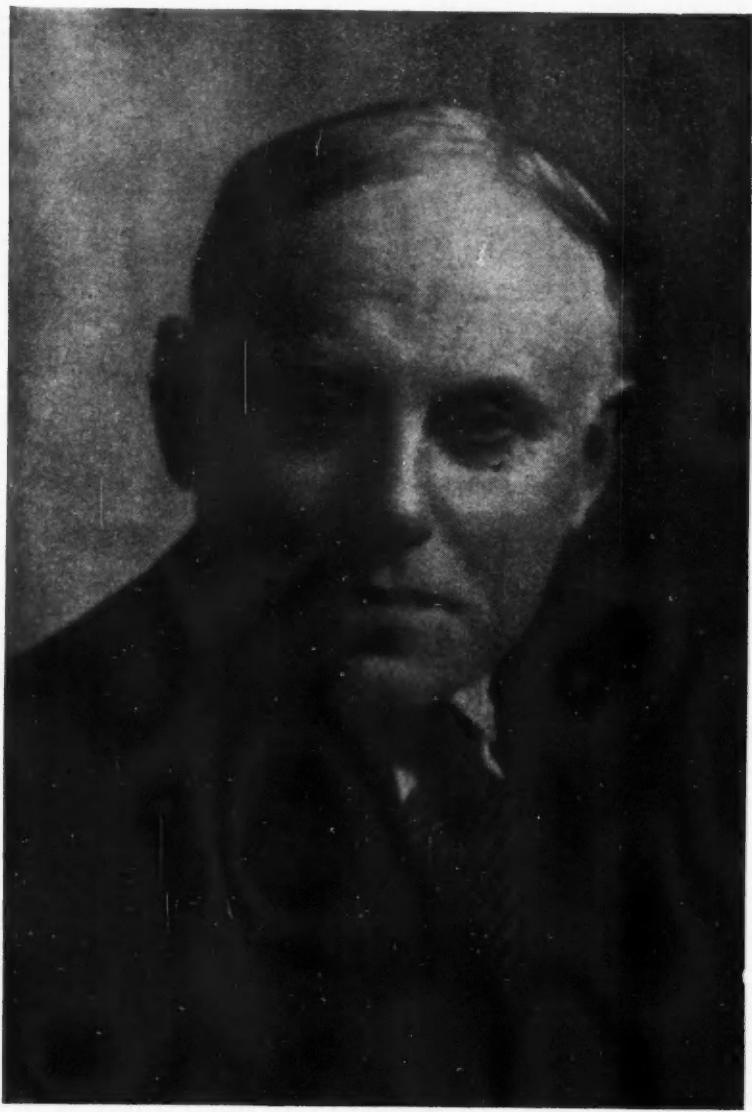
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DRAMA

The Quarterly Theatre Review

NEW SERIES

WINTER 1947

NUMBER 7

A PERUSAL of the principal theatre journals of the day will show the exceptional space which is set aside for articles dealing with foreign drama. This interest in the theatre abroad is a new phenomenon, which also finds notable expression not only in the International Theatre Institute promoted by UNESCO, but in the newly founded International Conference of the Amateur Theatre which held its first meeting at Rotterdam from August 19th to 21st, when thirty delegates from Holland, Belgium, France, Denmark, Sweden, Czechoslovakia and Great Britain met to discuss the future of the amateur theatre throughout the world. Observers were also present from the British Council and UNESCO, and the British delegation included Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth, Mr. John English, Mr. T. J. Lewis (from Wales), Mr. A. S. G. Loxton (from Northern Ireland), and Miss Frances Mackenzie. Mr. Whitworth was elected Chairman of the Conference, which at its first meeting set up three sub-committees to investigate three definite problems. Their reports were submitted to the final meeting of the full Conference, and all were unanimously accepted. Three sub-committees will remain in being until the next Conference, which is to be held in Prague next summer. The first will work out a scheme for the management and organisation of the Federation. The second will get to work immediately on the exchange and recommendation of plays on an international basis, and the third will deal with the exchange of amateur companies and drama instructors, and the possible participation of amateurs in courses of drama in foreign countries. The British delegation is sponsored by the British Drama League with its Headquarters at 9 Fitzroy Square. The Conference ended with a hearty vote of thanks to Dr. P. Cleveringa, the organiser of the meetings at Rotterdam, to Mr. J. de Blieck of the Netherlands Amateur Theatrical Union, and to the Municipality of Rotterdam and the Dutch Government for their unlimited hospitality. It will at once be seen that here is the nucleus of an international alliance which may have profound consequences. Even more, perhaps, than the professional, the amateur theatre offers opportunity for human intercourse between the nations on the level of the ordinary man and woman. At the same

time, the amateur theatre with its educational implications and its increasing following in every country, forms an important part of the theatrical scene as a whole. The presence of Mr. Maurice Kurtz, the UNESCO observer who is also the secretary of the International Theatre Institute in Paris, and his obvious interest in the proceedings, suggested that ultimately some measure of fusion with the International Institute must be considered, and without committing either side at present, it was clearly the wish of the Conference as a whole that the avenue to such a fusion should be the subject of close investigation.

PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

by Philip Hope-Wallace

GONE are the piping days of war when the only thing which would dislodge a West End Hit was a direct hit on the theatre and when audiences sat happily through any nonsense because it took the weight off their feet. Nowadays there is a General Post every week or so ; plays which do not please are dismissed to the outer suburbs (it used to be the critics who went to the outer suburbs in search of novelty) and a play or a player who earns a round of applause is aware of real earning power and is correspondingly proud. The audience is thinner . . . and thinner-lipped ! The box office (now nearly as polite as a tobacconist) may look sad but the true friend of the theatre is more cheerful. In short, profits are down and standards up ; and a penny is well spent on a London evening paper to tell which is the latest resting place of the play you intend to see.

Importations, revivals, translations, adaptations have abounded ; good new plays have been scarce and even passable new plays—for the purpose of this article which deals with current pieces—have in many cases to be passed over. At least one American triumph, Van Druten's *The Voice of the Turtle*, quickly ceased coo-ing, in spite of some pretty playing ; the problem of the bedless G.I. and the humours of female-bachelor housekeeping proved by now only mildly entertaining across the cavernous spaces of the Piccadilly Theatre. But another American success, *Deep are the Roots*, has rightly made the grade. One must not exclude in estimating its success the fact that it portrays the Southern States American as a hypocrite and racialist which sets up in the British breast a glow of self-righteousness which he is not often allowed to

feel these days (especially by his American cousins). The drama concerns the ill treatment afforded to a Negro soldier who returns after some years among the tolerant British to find himself at home still the victim of fear, discrimination and knavery, just another "dam nigger" framed and persecuted, and how his return, thus emancipated, divides the loyalties of a senator's home. It is, at its worst, verbose, melodramatic and unfair. But like another play by these authors, D'Usséau and Gow, who wrote *Tomorrow the World*, it is continuously true to the theatre. The theme is brought to life and argued in terms of recognisable and sympathetic humans; the two sisters, beautifully played by Faith Brook and Betsy Drake, are credible and touching figures and there is real tragic power in their predicament when one finds that her instinctive racial hatred betrays her liberal aspirations and the other (a kind of desperate Juliet *de nos jours*) finds that she is slowly but surely falling in love with a Negro. The Negro is played with touching dignity by Gordon Heath and the small parts are all one could ask.

J. B. Priestley, not content with his charade about marriage gives us in *The Linden Tree* one of the strongest and least "fancy" of all his plays, a firm, straight play for once which harks back to *Time and the Conways* (in its realisation of family life and the inherent and unceasing drama inherent in it) and yet it poses a theme which is timeless (in every sense); the theme of the man whom circumstance and old age try to conquer but who will not give up. It is a moving evening, even though—and in spite of playing of superlative quality—it is not somehow quite great enough as writing for its theme. As so often with Mr. Priestley, his very excellence and capability in craftsmanship seem to be the enemy of his inspiration. The work lacks poetry (except at one moment where an old man and a child listen to some music); the exaltation of a great theme greatly handled just fails. The theme of the play is "Stick to your guns" even if appearances may suggest that your views (in this case the creed of history as preached by a loyal old Liberal Professor) are out of fashion and pressure be brought to bear on you, for family and state reasons to retire; yet, it may be that you are still useful. Every line of the play is the work of a skilled craftsman, and the casting could not be improved. Besides Lewis Casson, Sybil Thorndike as the Mother, and among the children John Henderson and Tilda Page contribute most appealing and convincing portraits. It is a good play, and if it does not quite rise to the full indications of its theme it at least provides a play, and not like some of J.B.P.'s offerings, merely a pungent sermon on our human problem.

The balance is tipped too much towards mere entertainment in Noel Coward's *Peace in Our Time*, which depicts an imaginary Knightsbridge pub. during the (imaginary) German occupation of this country. It certainly would not be Mr. Coward's play if much were not made of this situation. He has always excelled in swift, sharp theatrical strokes and in swift, sharp portraits

of the kind of people who might be supposed to patronise such an establishment. The evening is full of good things which yet do not add up to a play worthy of the theme, but only to first rate melodrama. The patriotism is laid on with a trowel; the humour is brisk, tart and telling; the action competently dramatic, tightening the scalp and making the heart knock. But the total effect is curiously empty, even cheap.

Nor can it be said that *Point Valaine* (with which the Lunts failed in America some years ago) really justified presentation over here. It might have been a good, laconic short story *à la* Somerset Maugham, this tale of a *declassé* proprietress of a South Sea Island hotel who is torn between degrading passion for a bestial head waiter and a purer love for a pink young airman. In the end she loses both (by mistiming a rendezvous); the airman goes off with the other residents and the head waiter throws himself to the sharks. "I must get a new head waiter," says Mrs. Valaine, in the manner of someone in Henry Graham's *Ruthless Rhymes*! Meanwhile we have had a steamy tropical melodrama in an idiom which suits melodrama ill; terms, that is, of studied ineloquence, cynical pauses and clipped platitudes. It does not work, and Mary Ellis, hardly helped by a clumsy production, could not win us over to caring for this ineloquent *femme fatale*.

Trespass, which has survived a move and change of cast was rather a come-down for Emlyn Williams who so nearly touched greatness in that previous play with a supernatural theme *The Wind of Heaven*. The new piece has passages of contrived eeriness and some delightful strokes of humour (for example Marjorie Rhodes as a fake medium from the flat, sing-song Midlands); but generally this exercise in spook hunting in an old Welsh castle falls rather flat in spite of the author as an exploited medium who hardly dares acknowledge how authentic he really is and, among other good players, Francoise Rosay (of all unsuitable choices) as a bereft widow who dabbles too dangerously with the black arts. The struggle and final death of the little Welshman is theatrically exciting but is never quite important enough; another case of Mr. Williams' failing to create a "hero."

James Bridie's *Dr. Angelus* is a good joke and makes a good part for Alistair Sim, yet it is a curiously pointless piece for all that. It retells (in 1918) a tale of wife poisoning, not at all unlike the true history of the late Dr. Pritchard, and decks it out with much good discursive talk, a few delightful small sketches (notably Molly Urquhart as a slut) and concentrates interest in the murderer's young assistant, nicely played by George Cole, who finds himself an unwilling accomplice after the deed and in a typical Bridie scene, has a dream which shows him the error of his ways. The play is lively, adult and shameless and should draw much larger audiences than it has so far, though it could hardly be done without the co-operation of Mr. Sim.

Two new plays of promise may be mentioned. *The Chiltern Hundreds*,

by William Douglas Home (author of *Now Barabbas*), is a country house comedy exhibiting the topsy turvey fun peculiar to our post-war dissolution. The aristocrats (an endearing couple, beautifully played by A. E. Matthews and Marjorie Fielding) feed the ducks and so on, while the butler stands for parliament as conservative candidate against the young earl who stands, and is defeated, in the labour interest. The comedy thus contrived is obvious enough and often most inexpertly treated, but a sharp, sympathetic and delightful wit plays over even the dullest situations, recalling a little Wilde or Saki.

The Girl Who Couldn't Quite (awful title), by Leo Marks, is really two plays ; one, a drama, about a tramp who has the power to exercise the neurosis of a warped orphan girl ; the other a farce about the fun that occurs when country-house smarties have to entertain this Rasputin in their own vulgar midst. Somewhere a play of quality lurks but fails to emerge. Much of the writing, however, is truly theatrical, and Clifford Mollison somehow holds it all together expertly.

SOLEMN THOUGHTS

by Geoffrey Whitworth

NO less than birth or death, a man's retirement from his life's work is a very commonplace incident. Yet, albeit of slight consequence to the scheme of things entire, it is an incident which has formed the pivot of countless agreeable plays among which *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, and now *The Linden Tree* instantly rise to the mind as justly popular examples. If, then, the director of the British Drama League is about to make his voluntary plunge into oblivion, he may perhaps be granted a few backward glances upon the stage he leaves.

“The player bows farewell, his grief restrains,
Mindful that though he goes, the play remains.”

So now I cannot avoid a further commonplace in asking you to contemplate for a moment the extraordinary changes which have come upon the theatrical scene since the League was founded eight and twenty years ago. Yes, and why not? For if the theatre was to be true to its vocation of showing the very age and body of the times their form and pressure, such changes were only to be expected. The mental and moral atmospheres of the inter-war, the second war, and the post-war years have all received appropriate expression at the hands of the stage, while the theatre as an institution has re-acted with equal sensitivity to the material and political cataclysms in the world at large.

In spite of this, I am afraid I have come to believe that the British theatre today is of rather less artistic importance than during that famous period which closed with the death of Sir James Barrie in 1937. If I am right, the cause must be found, not in any inherent defect or failure in the artistry of those who serve the theatre, but rather in the inevitable degradation of the conditions in which we are living. Other times not less turbulent than ours have nourished a drama of stupendous achievement. But where can we look for such nourishment today? The fact is that the flame of man's soul is flickering nigh to death, and for a parallel to our parlous situation we must revert to the so-called dark ages. Even the theatre of the left, where one might hope to discover signs of recuperation, disappoints. Saucy propaganda and a love of strife for its own sake are not the best ingredients for an artistic banquet. Only such firmly established writers as Noel Coward and J. B. Priestley (different as they are) seem to preserve something of that urbanity of outlook which is needed for the creation of what is likely to endure.

And yet, if unending talk about "organisation" and busy planning of the machinery of play-production can provide a way of salvation, the outlook is rosy indeed, and may justify a man of faith in hoping that at the turn of the tide the good ship Theatre may set her sails to novel and more rewarding voyages. Certainly never before in our history has the drama been more highly esteemed by our rulers. Through the Arts Council the Government has become at long last an active patron of the stage. The Ministry of Education encourages its local authorities to expend rate-provided money on dramatic training in the counties. City Fathers, some of them, are eager for the day when legislation may be passed to enable them to found and run municipal theatres. The National Theatre itself, but for the present economic crisis, might well have been rising by now to dominate with its symbolic temple of dramatic art the southern bank of river Thames midway between the bridges of Charing Cross and Waterloo. And in the revolution of public opinion which has made all this possible, the British Drama League was undoubtedly the pioneer.

Most of us have forgotten how little in those days there was of understanding or appreciation of the theatre as a national asset. Almost alone among the countries of Europe, England gave no official backing to the drama. Those who deplored this neglect had scant opportunity to voice their disgust. It was not surprising, therefore, that the League from its very beginning was able to attract a large number of influential supporters anxious to press their opinion that the theatre should be given an honourable place in the national set-up, not only as a means of delightful entertainment, but as a powerful instrument of culture. Not yet had the policy of "Further Education" been adumbrated, but when that happened the remaining survivors of those early pioneers had the satisfaction of finding their theories well in the foreground of the new picture of state education.

From among those pioneers who had so generously helped to found the League there was one man, alas no longer with us, whose name I am sure that everyone would wish to be singled out for special mention : the name of Harley Granville-Barker. How well I remember our first meeting ! He came to see me in the narrow slip of a room at the office of Chatto and Windus the publishers with whom I was then associated. In the summer of 1919 the League was still in the process of formation, and H. G. B., just returned from America, had only heard of it from our mutual friend Norman Wilkinson, the creator of those golden fairies which had provided such a sensation in the pre-war Barker production at the Court theatre. Not a little flattered by this unsolicited encounter with the most eminent theatre man of the day, I experienced the added delight of commanding my scheme to one who seemed already converted. Rather should I say to one who instantly shared to the full my own vision and who, I knew, would be able to contribute to it a fund of experience and authority which I myself could never command. I hinted as much in the course of our talk. "But that's all to the good," he asserted, "for you can approach the whole tricky business with a fresh and open mind. No one can accuse you of having a personal axe to grind, and if you keep your head and refuse to be intimidated by any clique or vested interest, you cannot fail. This thing is *in the air.*" He readily agreed that the scope of the League should include both the professional and the amateur theatre, on the broad basis of our already declared object : "to assist the art of the theatre and to promote a right relation between the drama and the life of the community." By this definition we hoped to make it plain that our first concern was the theatre for the theatre's sake, but that bound up with that was the conviction that a proper partnership between theatre and the ordinary citizen was essential for the health of both.

When Granville-Barker rose to leave I felt that matters could not be allowed to rest there. "Will you be Chairman of our Council?" I found myself asking. Almost automatically and without a trace of hesitation came the answer, "I will." And though my query had been quite unpremeditated, and had been made with no mandate from my colleagues, I knew that none would gainsay that I had brought them a jewel whose worth was beyond price. And Granville-Barker was as good as his word. For twelve years or more he presided at Council meetings, spoke for the League on various public occasions, and generally did his very best to steer the League to prosperity and permanence.

To attempt a survey of the League's development or to thank the many friends and colleagues for their so valued help is beyond my present purpose. But it should be just noted here that in the course of time, the scope of the League as at first envisaged by its founders came to be modified. Without departure from its basic principles, it was inevitable that a body whose membership was drawn overwhelmingly from amateurs of the theatre should concentrate more and more on their service. Till now a balance in our activities

has been preserved, but the remarkable growth of the amateur movement begins to encroach on our capacities of administration and finance. I sometimes wonder where all this will end.

In olden times our ancestors felt impelled to build a church in every village. Then came the non-conformist chapels, almost as numerous. Now the Little Theatre is all the rage, and if things go on as they seem to be going, every hamlet will soon possess its community centre with playhouse attached. This is of good augury, a sign that the spirit of man simply declines to be deprived of its right to expression. But how far the theatre can take the place of the church is a moot point depending on your own view of their respective functions. I for one believe that much will be lost to human personality if it remains too long aloof from contact with another world. And with that loss, in spite of M. Sartre, much also will be taken from the dramatic interest of human character as exhibited on the stage. Hitherto the drama has relied for its subject matter on human souls regarded as in themselves immensely important. Deprived of a religious background, can this importance be long maintained? We can only wait and see.

A HUNDRED YEARS OF “BOX AND COX”

by R. H. Ward

ON November 1st, 1847, *Box and Cox*, a farcical “romance of real life” in one act, was performed for the first time at the Royal Lyceum Theatre; and one may say that it has been continually performed ever since. But few for whom its title is a household word would be able to say who wrote it, and fewer still would be able to give the name of another piece by the same dramatist, for this classic farce is like Flotow’s *Martha*, Wallace’s *Maritana* or Balfe’s *The Bohemian Girl* in the world of music, the only work of its author now generally known. Yet John Maddison Morton, born in 1811, the second son of another popular dramatist of his day, Thomas Morton, must have been one of the most prolific of British playwrights. During the thirty years following the production of *My First Fit of the Gout* at the Queen’s Theatre, Tottenham Street, in 1835, considerably more than a hundred of his pieces, for the most part farces and burlesques, were played in London and the provinces; the reputations of such actors as Buckstone and Harley were largely made in them; and Morton is said to have caused more

Sir Spencer Ponsonby-Fane, Gen. Sir Henry de Bathe, and Mr. Quinton Twiss, as Cox, Sergeant Bouncer and Box, in "Cox and Box" produced by the Canterbury "Old Stagers" in 1887.



laughter than any other dramatist of his day. Yet who now hears of *Done on Both Sides*, *My Husband's Ghost*, *The Trumpeter's Wedding* or *A Lad from the Country*?

Box and Cox alone remains, and this is undoubtedly because it possesses some indefinable quality which gives it the right to be called a minor classic. Its central situation—that of one lodging-house room unscrupulously let by Mrs. Bouncer to both Box, who works by night, and Cox, who works by day—is certainly half the secret of its success. Yet, like a great many of Morton's plays, *Box and Cox* had its origins in France ; he compounded it of two Parisian *vaudevilles*. It is somewhat surprising that it should both appear to be so essentially English and also give the impression of complete integrity of conception. Its form and balance are such that it is hard to believe that it is not the offspring of one man's invention. Apart from that, however, it has that excellence of craftsmanship which, while it develops a situation in a way which we recognise as inevitable, at the same time continually confronts us with the unexpected. One false move, and the whole farcical edifice, built upon an impossibility which the dramatist has nevertheless persuaded us to accept unquestioningly, must topple into nonsense and fatuity. The false move does

not occur because the formal pattern of the play's action upon which this balancing feat is so soundly based, is a little marvel of structural economy and artfulness.

The dialogue is another aspect of the same basic formalism. It is hardly extravagant to say that a page of it looks in its way as shapely in print as a page from a Greek comedy ; the words themselves seem to make a picture of Box and Cox tossing between them the verbal ball of their comic situation, a ball which Mrs. Bouncer occasionally intervenes to catch, but never to let fall. This dialogue is hardly at all a matter of wit or satire ; it is very English and very Victorian, punning, alliterative, hyperbolic and absurd. It gets its laughs in good *bourgeois* fashion out of eligible widows, bathing-machines, eating and the language of telegrams ; it manages to make the name Margate funny by setting it beside the name Ramsgate ; it is obvious and without subtlety, but it is always skilful, economic, cleverly timed and essentially speakable. Not the least of its qualities is its sly use of repetition—on the honoured principle that what has already been said twice will be funny when it is said a third time. *Box and Cox* has become a period-piece, and this no doubt gives it an advantage nowadays, when we find costumes laughable which were once everybody's wear ; but the play's business has not changed, nor have its verbal jokes, and these still get their laughs in the right places ; there seems little reason to suppose that they will not do so in another hundred years' time.

John Maddison Morton died, in somewhat straitened circumstances, in 1891. The vogue of burlesque was over. It was no longer thought funny, as it had been when W. S. Gilbert did it, to call a play *The Merry Zingara*, or the *Topsy Gipsy and the Pipsy Wipsy*. With the one exception, Morton's plays went off the boards. F. C. Burnand made a version of *Box and Cox*, called *Cox and Box* (in which Mrs. Bouncer rather regrettably becomes Sergeant Bouncer), which Arthur Sullivan set to music. Originally done to amuse friends at a private party of Burnand's, perhaps the chief interest of this version lies in the fact that it was Sullivan's first and quite unpremeditated essay in comic opera and led more or less directly, as Mr. Leslie Baily has told us in his broadcast *Gilbert and Sullivan*, to the collaboration with Gilbert. Sullivan's growing popularity at the Savoy may have helped to keep the original *Box and Cox* before the public ; but there is every reason to suppose that it would in any case have held the stage because of its classic form and technical brilliance.

It is seldom performed by professionals in these days, when the one-acter has become the province of the amateur. But amateurs have stood by *Box and Cox*, as it has stood by them ; it is reputed to be the most popular of all plays with schools ; possibly an evening does not pass on which it is not played somewhere in Britain. And a professional company under the Arts Council did tour the play in England and Scotland during the war, while it is pleasant to be able to report that, this summer of its centenary, another professional company is making it a not unworthy companion-piece to Mr. Shaw's *A Village Wooing*.

THEATRE IN PALESTINE

by *Walter Levy*

HERE could be no better illustration of the still wide cultural gulf between the two principal communities in Palestine, Jews and Arabs, than the fact that the first has four well-established professional theatres and scores of amateur groups, and now a children's theatre whose actors are children, in a hard-working community of approximately 700,000—while the latter though numbering more than a million have none of these. The reason for this phenomenon is obvious. The bulk of the Arab population still live in semi-feudal conditions, though Arab films from Egypt and the Arabic programmes of the Palestine Broadcasting Service may by and by result in a fundamental change and lead to the establishment of Arab theatre too. But the Jews, even when reverting intentionally to manual labour, cannot discard the inherited inclination towards matters spiritual, and they certainly do not intend to.

Thus, in speaking of theatre in Palestine, I must speak of Hebrew theatre only, although one should not overlook the valiant endeavour of the British community there to maintain their own dramatic societies. However, these are necessarily somewhat aloof from the Palestine scene. Theatre in Palestine is Hebrew theatre so far, though I hope that the Arabs will soon awaken to the need of a theatre of their own.

"Habimah" is the oldest Hebrew theatre in Palestine, being world-renowned through its early association with the great Moscow theatre, and with names such as Stanislavsky and Vachtangov, and through extensive tours over Europe and America in which their foreign audiences were fascinated by the uncommon, almost exotic style of acting. "Habimah" created Hebrew theatre, without even having a Hebrew audience in the beginning. But it is not the only important theatre in Palestine, "Ohel" and the "Chamber Theatre" now being close runners-up in the favour of Palestinian audiences. There are also the cabaret theatres "Matateh" (which means "Broom") and "Li-La-Lo" (which means anything), both of whom enjoy immense popularity on account of their biting satire on politics and inter-communal relations.

The background, social and economic, of Hebrew theatre in Palestine, is so vastly different from that of theatres elsewhere that it must be considered in any study of the subject however cursory. While the concentration of Jews, not of their making and volition originally, in intellectual professions enhanced their contribution to art and science in Europe and America, in

Palestine something like the reverse occurred at the beginning of Jewish settlement, as the Jews were striving hard and are still striving to normalise the composition of their society with its implied preference for manual labour. The return to nature and the land, the abandonment of art and the town—that was the state of affairs when colonisation got its way in Palestine. And even those who wished to maintain culture had often to abandon the attempt in the severe struggle for adaptation to new conditions and surroundings. In this, of course, Palestine did not differ essentially from other experiments in colonisation, and whatever art was created at first it was amateurish and rather parochial. Significantly "Habimah" did not grow in Palestine, but came from Russia to implant itself in the cultural life there. It had already crystallised its style, and to this day its learnings to Russian theatre are clearly discernible.

The period of transition to a more accomplished theatre was incredibly short for a country in process of colonisation—and this is due to the generally high educational level of Jewish settlers. A quick development of the art of acting was stimulated but, as the Jews were determined and rightly so, to revive the Hebrew language, the growth of the creative art of writing was retarded. No Hebrew dramatist of the calibre of a Schnitzler has so far arisen, nor could it be expected in the nature of things, and in consequence the Hebrew theatre had actors, but no playwrights, falling back on a repertoire of Jewish authors and Jewish subjects mainly from East Europe, whence most of the settlers hailed. Naturally they expected to see on the stage what was known and familiar to them from the days of their childhood in Poland and Russia. There was no native youth of Palestine eager for a theatre dealing with new problems or curious to learn, through the medium of the stage, of alien worlds of thought and feeling. Palestine audiences at that time were so self-centred in their work of revival of a national soil and a national culture that they did not tire of seeing time and again on the stage the drama of fear and fury, the tears and tantrums of the little Jewish man, as he was melodramatically depicted in historical, biblical and romantic plays. European classics were chosen with regard to their "Jewishness." So we find Gutzkow's *Uriel D'Acosta*, Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, Calderon's *Crown of David*, and a weak Galsworthy play, *Loyalties*, on the repertoire list of the Hebrew theatre of that time. A Jew there had to be, always. However in recent years "Habimah" for instance has increasingly brought to the knowledge of the Hebrew public great classics which are not necessarily "Jewish," and this in spite of the lack of public enthusiasm, and of the high costs which precisely because of this lack of public enthusiasm, had only the remotest chance of being covered. Nevertheless, one finds on their repertoire such plays as Racine's *Phedre*, *Hamlet*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (in a quite impossible version), and lastly the *Oedipus* of Sophocles.

Scene from "Hamlet" as produced by the Habima Players.



Of great importance was the emergence of the "Ohel" workers theatre shortly after "Habimah" had settled for good in Palestine in the early twenties. The "Ohel" started as a group of amateurs, workers who spent their leisure in an effort to float a Socialist Hebrew theatre. They grew up to full-fledged professional theatre with the help of the powerful trades unions organisation, the "Histadrut," which today may be said to comprise within its ranks more than two fifths of the Jewish community. Theatre with them was not only an effort of "l'art pour l'art," it had besides a social role to perform. It had to stimulate new social ideas and ideals. "Ohel" was different from "Habimah" in that it grew out of the soil of Palestine; it was cruder, uncertain of its style, yet rather more expressive of the new life and turmoil. By and by, the "Ohel" too came to realise that a national Hebrew theatre need not necessarily mean a purely Jewish repertoire, and they have to their credit a galaxy of performances of plays by modern European authors like Shaw's *Doctor's Dilemma*, and *Arms and the Man*; Priestley's *Desert Highway* and *They Came to a City*. They also tried their hand at Moliere's comedies.

No reference was, however, made from the stage to acute political conditions and relationships in Palestine proper. Whether this was due only to censorship or just to lack of suitable material from Palestine playwrights, I cannot judge. Political satire in cabarets, however, was always tolerated and

it was often bitter and incisive. There was one case of a cabaret singer in Haifa being taken away from the stage to prison, for a song she had sung for weeks before. She was suspected of terrorist connections, and though soon released the case aroused much resentment.

It is the "Matateh" cabaret, now already more than twenty years old, that is most persistent not only in its sarcastic attacks upon the Mandatory power and the British in general, but in its even more outspoken attacks on Jewish faults and deficiencies. Topical problems are judged and solved in laughter not without tears. Once they staged a show about the Jewish state to come, and I shall never forget the pathetic figure of an old Jew who bothered a high and mighty official of the Jewish state's embassy in Warsaw—with his plea to be allowed to tread on Jewish soil once more. Pathetic, sentimental, but played with the force of conviction. No wonder then that "Matateh" has the affection of all the Jewish public, which means a lot, as that public is so heterogeneous. "Matateh" also tried to stage full-length comedies, as for instance, *The Spoilt Child*, by Ashmann, a gifted Palestinian playwright, in which he attacked the depravity of urban civilisation in Tel-Aviv. Significantly his solution was a "retour à la nature," on the land, in a communal settlement. Here is the germ of real *comédie de moeurs*, which as a rule we get only vaudeville and satirical songs from our cabarets.

The Arab does not appear on the Jewish stage, or very rarely. That important subject—Arab-Jewish relations—is "taboo" not only because of official censorship, but because of the natural hesitancy of a community still far from being mature enough to explore objectively the roots of its very life.

A word may be said here about the organisation and administration of professional Hebrew theatres. They function as co-operatives, i.e., revenue is shared, and no new forces can be introduced without the consent of all the group. What is more, and a serious handicap, the repertoire is chosen by the co-operative, and often other than purely artistic considerations are decisive. Until recently even the two most important theatres, "Habimah" and "Ohel", had no halls of their own in Tel-Aviv. But now both have halls and stages equipped with up-to-date machinery. All the theatres have their seat in Tel-Aviv, but often go on tour to visit the other towns and outlying settlements.

Many communal settlements and colonies have amateur dramatic circles. I have no figures available, but if one bears in mind that a communal settlement has on the average a mere 300 inhabitants, and that they are working hard throughout the day (often having to keep watch during the night too), it is certainly a matter for admiration they make such persistent efforts to stage performances. The "Histadrut" often provides trained instructors for performances which these settlement groups are planning for some festival or pageant. Children are naturally most eager to participate and the settlement schools are favourably inclined. Not so in the towns, though I for one am convinced that

drama should have its place in a school's curriculum, no less than excursions and sport. Through drama the receptive minds of children can be inspired not only with love for art, with an interest in wider human relationships beyond narrow, national concepts and habits. In this direction a courageous enterprise was started about a year ago in Haifa by Mr. Yaron. Overcoming opposition from educational authorities, Mr. Yaron has brought together a children's theatre group to perform plays especially written for the purpose. Realising the success of that group, school authorities have now come round to support it, even I think, setting apart school-hours for dramatic exercise. This is a truly pioneer achievement, as schools have so far been very reluctant to let their pupils perform.

One cannot speak of the theatre without mentioning the audience. I mentioned already that the first immigrants were mainly of the manual labour pioneer type and that they came from Eastern Europe. Their preferences and idiosyncrasies determined theatrical fare. But after 1933, the year of Hitler's rise to power in Germany, a new type of settler arrived who brought with him the amenities of urban life and the need for urban cultural activity. The German Jews, who came in ever increasing numbers after 1933 were in the main doctors, lawyers, merchants, industrialists, and the money they brought with them allowed them to continue in their professions, although a surprising number of these people switched over to agriculture and other manual labour. Among these German Jews were also a number of actors, playwrights, producers, though the more famous like Elisabeth Bergner, Reinhardt, Lion Feuchtwanger went to America or England. They had to be reckoned with in the repertoire of the theatres, and indeed the window to the West in Hebrew theatre was opened more widely.

But while "Habimah" secured the services of a noted German Jewish novelist as their advisor, and "Ohel" took another German Jew, as their chief producer, no German actors were absorbed in the Hebrew theatre. Some of these German actors formed a new theatre, the "Hebrew Theatre," which tried to introduce modern European drama. But the audience failed them, nor were German and Western European Jews numerous enough to support this venture. And while they had in Europe been enthusiastic theatre goers, they withdrew from the theatre in spite of the attempts to attract them by an increasing number of classical performances. This illustrates the difficulties the audience presents because of its heterogeneity. There is only the hope that the youth growing up in Palestine may reach a synthesis which finds expression in theatre repertoire too. Noteworthy in this respect is the recent formation of the "Chamber Theatre," which resumed the shortlived tradition of the "Hebrew Theatre." The director of the "Chamber Theatre" is a young man from Prague who grew up in Palestine, but still remembers German and other Central European theatres; his actors are partly actors from Germany

and young actors from Palestine, and they have ventured to perform such modern plays as Anouilh's *Antigone*, Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, Capek's *Life of the Insects*.

Summing up, I would say that theatre can attain perfection only when its word, as it is written, as it is spoken, and as it is perceived, is of the highest possible purity. Only civilisations of old vintage can attain that. It would be foolish to expect the Hebrew theatre to reach harmony at once in a growing expending community, in the general bustle of construction and turmoil. But the achievements of a short twenty years augur well for the future. Hebrew theatre has grown up from parochial childhood to adolescent exploration of the world beyond—it has not yet reached the stage of exploring within. It has no tools, no tradition, no tongue but what it has shaped and fashioned itself. While training itself, it has had to train its audience in hearing and speaking the old-new language that is still unfamiliar, in familiarising a reluctant and self-centred audience with things other than Jewish.

We are still very poor as regards the written word. In the nature of things, before great Hebrew drama can grow, the great dramatic literature of the world beyond must inspire our playwrights. Through the medium of translation we are ever more acquainted with the treasures of dramatic literature of all nations and all ages (not excluding the German, though the difficulties in this respect may be gauged from the fact that the granting of an official Jewish prize to a translation of Goethe's *Faust* was resented by some Hebrew authors).

As to the spoken word, our actors lack exchange of ideas and technique with European theatre. Some of them ought to study abroad, and visits like that of Tyrone Guthrie, who directed "Habimah's" performance of *King Oedipus*, must become more frequent. Education in theatre, apart from the school curriculum, ought also to find a place at the Hebrew University, not so much for the training of professionals as to vivify the methods of instruction in schools.

Education in theatre and drama in the schools will in the end also affect the audience. We have to overcome the heterogeneity of our public, which either contents itself with reminiscences of past and recapitulations of present Jewish life, or shies away altogether from Hebrew theatre because of cherished memories of the theatre in Europe. After opening the window to the West, we should also open the window to the East, which means accepting the inspiration of the various traditions and styles of the whole of Asia. Hebrew theatre may then overcome its national limitations and play an important part in the cultural and social transformation of the East.



*Joan Littlewood's production for the Theatre Workshop Players in
"The Flying Doctor" by Molière, based on his notes taken from "Il
Medico Volante," of the Commedia del' Arte.*

*These Players have recently been seen at the Rudolf Steiner Hall, London,
in "Operation Olive Branch," a new version of the "Lysistrata" of
Aristophanes.*

ITALIAN TUG-OF-WAR

by Marie Seton

FOR longer than anyone now living can remember there has been a tug-of-war going on in the Italian theatre. On the one end of the rope there are the literary gentlemen with romantic and even imperial longings ; while on the other tug the still exuberant descendants of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, with the shade of Plautus standing under an olive tree laughing at all the grandiloquent poetry that was, and is, passed off as passion.

Though there is no sign of a clear cut victory for one or the other of the two contending teams, the latter appears to have an advantage in 1947. This is largely because its present great exponent, Eduardo di Filipi, the Neopolitan, has become a national figure and so raised the Regional or Dialect Theatre up from the provincial standing it held for far too long a time.

But to go back a step ; in fact, to the end of the nineteenth century when the dialect theatre began to flourish in specific areas—in Naples, Venice and Sicily. Though these theatres gained a following among the people they could not influence and invigorate the more literary drama derived from the Renaissance court theatres because at that time they were, in a sense, the theatres of different nations, their linguistic differences being such that the Romans could not comprehend the Sicilian nor the Milanese the Neopolitan ; while the Venitians were equally incomprehensible to the Florentines.

Thus the remarkable personalities which developed within the Regional theatres were either compelled to remain local celebrities, or else to pass over into the more static, classical theatres in the Tuscan language. Such was the case with Eleanora Duse who, in the 1880's, momentarily revolutionised the whole Italian theatre scene with her performance of the one-act Sicilian play, *Cavlieri di Rusticana*, by Verga who, at that time, promised to become *the* dramatist of a united Italy.

But Verga's fame outside of Sicily was short lived since the flaming personality of D'Anunzio not only stole the thunder from Verga, but also drew the Duse over to the literary camp (although she herself remained as a bridge between the school of popular theatre and the school of the literary theatre.).

Had it not been for the polemics of D'Anunzio the extremely literary and classical trend of the Italian theatre might have died a natural death instead of creating a whole shoal of lesser poetic dramatists to rant and rave long after ranting and raving were out of fashion elsewhere.

Then a new figure entered on the stage who was bound to delight in the literary windbags and try to surpass anything so impudent and to the point as the raggle-taggle descendants of the *Commedia dell'Arte*—I mean

*Scene from "Glass Menagerie," by Tennessee Williams.
Production by Zucchino Visconti, Scenery by Mario Chiari.*



Photo, Antonis, Rome.

Benito Mussolini, who embraced and was embraced by D'Anunzio. Indeed during the years Mussolini ruled Italy he did everything in his power to create a so-called Fascist Italian theatre with D'Anunzio as its leader. This was not a great success with the better dramatists, although this move did bring to fruition some rather effective dramatic spectacles in open-air theatres. It also succeeded in practically barring the popular dialect plays from being performed in any important theatre. The reason now given for this preposterous action was that the dialect theatres, as the *Commedia dell'Arte* before them, delighted the people by poking sly fun at the ways of the masters and because regional dramatists did precisely nothing to elevate the Italian people in the hope of making them noble and fit descendants of the Roman Legions.

The Age of Fascism did not bring forth much of a school of dramatists, not even when Il Duce himself turned his hand to playwriting. It did, however, succeed in turning the more sensitive writers into themselves so that they created a rather spiritual and somewhat pessimistic theatre which appealed only to a handful of sophisticated and rather blasé souls. This trend was led and bolstered by the great prestige of Pirandello who, though it is said he held a membership card in the Facisti, was constitutionally not one of any Black Shirt Legion.

Pirandello, commencing as a dramatist close to the tradition of the Sicilian dialect drama, gradually became more and more pre-occupied with the philosophic until, following *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, his marvellous talent became somewhat petrified, at least in the eyes of many Italians, and he existed almost entirely as a word painter of "still life pictures" of situations which seldom found an echo in Italian life.

The modern literary theatre having commenced with the impassioned neo-classicism of D'Anunzio ended with the abstract classicism of Pirandello, which was not at all what Mussolini wanted. Hence there were official efforts made to galvanise into being an optimistic drama, the martial theatre having failed to materialise. But most dramatists refused to write to order since, as Gerardo Guerrieri, the young director—himself a product of Mussolini's educational system—says, "almost everyone felt the immorality of such a trend when we had begun to doubt the very system which produced us." So that attempt fell flat.

Dramatists such as Ludovici and Betti continued to write poetic dramas about matters which were no concern of Mussolini and almost as little related to Italian life. By the time the Ethiopian campaign got under way, Italian theatre directors were getting restive and irritated with Italian playwriting. They looked abroad for stimulating plays.

It is now claimed that the first new lifeblood to come into the Italian theatre was the production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. The play had a profound effect because it dealt with ordinary people who lived, loved and died more or less in the same simple manner as most Italians, and also because its production swept the theatre clear of exaggerations.

From the success of *Our Town* there has arisen a new movement in the Italian theatre, the so-called Directors' Movement, which is opposed to the theatre of cliches and is at the moment markedly international in outlook. Since the end of the war this group have become extremely important and they share the limelight with the unique and quite amazing Eduardo di Filipi, director, actor and writer of topical Neopolitan comedies which, apparently, reveal the Italians to themselves in a way which pleases and amuses them.

The members of the Directors' Movement greatly admire di Filipi because, though they are for the most part the offshoots of the literary theatre, they one and all believe that the Italian theatre must return to life, crude or melodramatic as it may be, and the life of the street, if it is once more to become a vital theatre appealing to a large and varied audience. Eduardo di Filipi alone has such an appeal in Italy, despite the fact that writing and acting in Neopolitan, a great proportion of his audience, outside of Naples, imperfectly understand the language in which he plays. They understand, however, the world he portrays and in that lies his appeal.

The recognised leader of the Directors' Movement is Luchino Visconti,

who established himself before the fall of Fascism with an adaptation of James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Immediately after the war he produced Jean Cocteau's *La Parent Terrible*, and followed this with *Fifth Column*, by Ernest Hemingway, Erskine Caldwell's *Tobacco Road*, Sartre's *Huis Clos*, an adaptation of *Crime and Punishment* and Tennessee Johnson's *The Glass Menagerie*. His colleagues claim that Visconti has done more for the Italian theatre in two years than anyone else has done in twenty years.

The other members of the Directors' Movement are Gerardo Guerrieri, whose productions of Betti's *Avalanche*, J. M. Barrie's *Holiday*, and *Life With Father*, have established him as an important young director. (Though his productions do not suggest it, he is one of the most erudite students of Italian theatre and culture in general.) The two remaining members of the present quartette are Gennani, who struck a completely new chord in the Italian theatre with his production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* and Costa who, so far, has produced *The Cherry Orchard*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and Ibsen's *Little Eyolf*. All of these directors are young men between thirty and forty years of age and they are characterised by a great friendliness towards each other and work in close co-operation.

Their only challenge come from the Institute of Italian Drama led by Sem Benelli, author of *The Jest*. This group claims that the Directors' Movement is anti-nationalist, whereas, in actuality, the movement appears to be predominantly concerned with good theatre and how to stimulate new dramatists.

One other movement is important for the future of the theatre in Italy and also in the matter of building an audience, and that is the non-professional, or partially professional Community Theatres. There is a new one in Milan headed by the young director Strelher, who made a considerable impression with a recent production of Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. In Florence there is an older Community Theatre which was founded within the University of Florence before the war. Unlike the Milanese theatre which seems to have a direction "towards life," the Florentine theatre is still in the throes of seeking new and foreign dramatic material which is essentially literary in character. The theatre is handicapped in obtaining new plays by lack of money and popular support. (Florence being a city where only the refined and intellectual people patronise the theatre at all.) The theatre has, however, self-sacrificing people in it who are making every effort. Its two guiding spirits, Loris Paesutti, the manager and director, and Rina Lonsca Moretti, a Russian actress and author of *The Snow Girl*, one of the theatre's most provocative productions, are certainly not lacking in zeal, even though their view of the theatre as a whole seems to be confined to the type of drama which put the old Gate Theatre on the map for sophisticated Londoners.

It is my impression after being in Italy for three weeks that though, according to all the estimates given me, there are but 10,000 people who

support the legitimate theatre (excluding, I think di Filipi's following) there is a tremendous latent dramatic talent which is at present working part time in making films in order to obtain the necessary money to develop the theatre which they believe they can create if they have the resources.

AMATEURS IN NEW ZEALAND

by Russell Reid

IF there is one place in the world where it can be truthfully said that the amateur theatre has kept the theatre itself alive, it is New Zealand.

For many years New Zealand was the happy hunting ground for touring professional companies, both musical and dramatic. Of varying standards, they flowed into New Zealand via Australia. Some were English companies, some were of American origin and some were of Australian manufacture. They received good support and built up a habit of theatre-going among the people in the towns and cities in which they played throughout the country. They left their mark in the development of certain critical standards. They also left behind them, on the back walls of stages and on walls high up on fly-floors, long lines of variegated posters and playbills. Old stage-hands can still be seen gazing at these with a wistful eye. Enthusiastic, theatre-minded youngsters can be found pouring over such names as Janet Achurch, John L. Toole, Oscar Asche, Gertrude Elliot, Seymour Hicks, Nellie Stewart, Irene Vanbrugh, H. B. Irving, Margaret Bannerman, Dion Boucicault and even Sarah Bernhardt. Old theatre-goers still say "those were the days," and within my young memory there was a time when scarcely a week passed during which I did not stand goggle-eyed, watching massive pieces of scenery being carried from wagons through the stage-door of our local theatre. But all that was long before the nineteen-thirties. After that came the day when the stage-door was closed. The "talkies" had hit New Zealand.

Meanwhile, however, amateur organisations had started to develop. If there were people growing up who had not seen a play or a musical-comedy presented on a stage by people who went about earning their living doing that sort of thing, they were beginning to get regular opportunities of seeing them done by amateurs. As the novelty of the "talkies" wore off, amateur theatre companies began to boom. Everywhere, in town and country districts, amateur companies were becoming firmly entrenched. They had their struggles and their defeats, of course, but soon were winning much support.

What helped many companies, particularly new organisations, to become established was the work of the British Drama League. A New Zealand branch organised area groups throughout the country. The League provided help,

materials in the way of plays, lecturers and organised festivals. Summer schools organised by the League for producers, actors and stage-staffs were frequently held in various parts of the Dominion. The League still functions and festivals are still regularly held, but many of the larger companies have withdrawn from active participation. With their greater resources they were rather swamping the smaller groups out of the festivals. For many of these smaller groups the festivals provide their only opportunity of playing before an audience, their work being largely confined to club or private activities. More and more of these little groups are springing up—in a suburban area, in a street, in a new housing estate.

Among the larger companies, some have reached the stage of either owning their own theatre or having money invested in land for the building of their own theatre when the more urgent national housing programme has been completed. Many of these companies employ professional producers, artists and stage-technicians. Many prefer to do all the work themselves and so find room in the group for carpenters, painters and electricians. Most of them produce six or eight full-length plays between February and December as well as providing readings, one-act play productions, private productions for members only, lectures, classes and social activities. The membership of these companies is open to all, although some have been forced at times to close their membership lists when they have found that they could have too many members. Membership numbers range from anything up to and beyond two thousand.

The choice of plays presented is wide and varied. As an example of this let me record that during the winter last year in one city alone I saw sincere and, at least, competent productions of such plays as *Ghosts*, *What Every Woman Knows*, *Mr. Bolstry*, *Juno and the Paycock*, *Skin of our Teeth*, *Anna Christie*, *Noah*, *The Tempest* and *A New Life*. Some of the companies can afford to spend hundreds of pounds on their scenery and costumes. Some perform minor miracles by ingenuity. The production of Shakespeare by many companies has in recent years proved more than worthwhile. Box office records have been broken and tours undertaken by several companies with outstanding success. Over the last fifteen years it has been left to amateur companies to provide schoolchildren with their only sight of Shakespeare on the stage.

In a country where social change has brought greatly increased hours of leisure (a universal forty-hour week means more time for rehearsal to these companies), it is good to find the theatre not only flourishing but being encouraged. Through the government's Physical Recreation and Welfare Department new groups can receive assistance in getting established. The Education Department encourages the use of drama work in the schools. Universities run their own drama festivals. Everywhere is good support for the theatre, amateur or professional, thanks to the work of amateurs.

THE EDITOR'S PAGE

THE NEW DIRECTOR

BY next Easter Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth will have retired from the Directorship of the British Drama League, and by unanimous invitation of the Council that office will have been assumed by Mr. E. Martin Browne. Apart from so many other qualifications, the new Director will bring a knowledge of the theatre throughout Britain which should prove of the utmost value. Mr. Whitworth will become Chairman of the Council, while Lord Esher remains as the League's President.

The death of the Earl of Lytton, which occurred on October 25th, is greatly to be deplored. He was a man of unusually wide interests and influence. In the dramatic field, besides being a Vice-President of the British Drama League, he was Chairman of the Old Vic, of the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art, and, for a long while, of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee. To all these institutions he gave unfailing and detailed attention, and his powerful platform advocacy of the National Theatre scheme will long be remembered. Among many noble qualities, his style and bearing were such as to excite the admiration of all who came into contact with him.

Following the example of the British Drama League, first in 1919 and again in 1945, under the chairmanship of Mr. J. B. Priestley, an important British Theatre Conference will take place at Caxton Hall, Westminster, London, from Thursday to Sunday, February 5th to 8th. It is regrettable that the Theatre Managers have so far decided to hold aloof, as without them some of the debates will lack reality. But most of the other interests in the theatre world will be represented. Subjects for discussion include the State in relation to the Theatre, Theatre Finance, Theatre Buildings, the Artist in the Theatre, Drama in Education, and the place of the Amateur in the Theatre. The Council of the British Drama League will appoint twelve official delegates, and a limited number of individual members of the League and representatives of affiliated societies will also be welcomed if they will communicate as

soon as possible with the Secretary of the Drama League. The fee for delegates, who will have voting powers, is 10s. 6d. per delegate, to be paid at the time of acceptance for membership of the Conference.

We are glad to announce the appointment of Mr. Charles Thomas to the staff of the Drama Schools Department. Mr. Thomas has for the past few years been Drama Adviser to the West Riding Education Committee. Before that he was assistant producer to Mr. William Armstrong of the Liverpool Playhouse, and at one time he acted with the Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre. Mr. Thomas is especially interested in Children's Drama, and will develop the League's work in this field. He will also work with Miss Mackenzie on B.D.L. courses and will be available as a travelling lecturer in addition to Mr. Frank Newman, who is already doing such successful work up and down the country.

At the same time we have to record with great regret the resignations of Mrs. Collingwood Selby and Miss Heather Conway. Mrs. Selby was obliged for family reasons to resign her post last March. She had been with us for six years, and her work as a teacher, her vivid personality, and her remarkable energy and enthusiasm were widely appreciated wherever she went. Miss Conway had been a most loyal member of the B.D.L. staff since 1928 and for eight years was Secretary to the Drama Schools Department. Now she leaves to take up work which offers wider scope to her gifts, as a Drama Adviser to the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds.

One up for the amateur movement! We quote the following from the current number of the *Theatre Industry Journal*. "Resident Managers, when they book amateur companies . . . are requested to insist that one of the terms of the agreement with the amateur producing company shall be to the effect that all performances given by amateurs shall be distinctly advertised as such, both inside and outside the theatre. The word 'Amateur' should appear in the programmes, billing and newspapers, otherwise, there are always a certain number of playgoers who, even after they have seen the performance, do not realise that it has been given by amateurs!"

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND

THERE has been no lack of excitement since I last gave you the news of the theatre from Scotland.

Chiefly, of course, it derived from the Edinburgh Festival—we ran strong temperatures over this new event long before it ever got around to scoring its rather striking initial success. Quite a lot of people wanted to know why native endeavour had—on the dramatic side of the Festival at any rate—been completely overlooked. The official reply that this was an international festival and none of the Scottish theatres had achieved international standards was hardly calculated to cool things off.

What seemed to be the final blow to national pride was an announcement that the Old Vic couldn't cast *John Knox*, a play which James Bridie had written with the Festival specially in mind. With "Knox" out of the running, the official dramatic field was left entirely to Shakespeare and the French plays of the Jovet Company. The only Scottish ventures were the unofficial amateur productions of *Macbeth* and Bridie's *Anatomist*, and the equally unofficial enterprise of Glasgow Unity at Edinburgh's Little Theatre, where they gave a season of *The Laird of Tornawatlie* and a Scots version of Gorki's *Lower Depths*.

The Festival is over but the argument continues, and I shudder to think what may happen next year if the promoters don't open the gate and let something truly Scots into the charmed circle. One suggestion is that a pieced team from the reps. in Glasgow, Perth and Dundee should do a home play—possibly something new by Bridie or by Robert McLellan, the most promising of our Lallans writers for the stage. The idea is not without its snags but it seems worth a second thought.

I should add that Bridie's *John Knox* wasn't wasted. Edinburgh didn't see it, but the Citizen's Theatre put it on in Glasgow and it turned out to be one of those plays about which it seems impossible to hold a half-way opinion. People either did a complete rave, or they felt that maybe it was as well the Old Vic didn't do it at the Festival.

Glasgow Unity provided another excitement—or rather the Arts Council did by withdrawing its backing on the ground that this Left-wing theatre group was deteriorating in its artistic standards. The reason given was a trifle misleading perhaps, for Unity can still put on a good show. The real trouble, I fancy, was that Unity, having acquired two or three money-making

plays like Robert McLeish's *Gorbals Story*, got to like the idea of making money and forgot their earlier ideals about pioneering.

The sequel is mildly amusing, for Unity, now in a position where they have to make money or fold up, recently announced four new Scottish plays for future production!

There have been developments too, in Perth, where our oldest established rep. is resident. A good rep. it is, too, but its rewards have not always matched its merits and Marjorie Dence and David Steuart, who founded it and have nursed it through some heart-breaking times, are now sharing their responsibilities with a public committee. The Arts Council have a say in Perth as well.

The Dundee rep. is wagging a very proud tail following a command performance of *At Mrs. Beams*. The Queen is an Angus woman and I daresay the command to Balmoral arose from her feeling that a pat on the back was due to a company which has managed to dig itself in at a spot which for years was theatrical desert.

One of the smaller reps.—the Rutherglen people who play in a converted church—recently hit the headlines by announcing a new play by Robert McLeish, author of Unity's gold-spinning *Gorbals Story*. There are rumours of renewed efforts to whip up support for a rep. in Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, in its new capacity as a Festival town, is feeling conscience-stricken about its own lack of a resident company.

The amateurs have been girding their loins for the winter and by the time you read this the full-length play festival will be under way in Glasgow, with Colin White, manager of the Citizen's Theatre, as the long-distance adjudicator. And the S.C.D.A. one-act festivals look like breaking more records, once again.

Everything in the Scottish garden may not necessarily be lovely, but it is at least lively.

DAVID KEIR

Now-a-Days, published by the Crabtree Press at 1s. 6d., is a most attractive new quarterly specialising in Book Reviews, Theatre, Music, Poetry and Art. The Contributing Editors are Hamilton Fyfe (Literary), Parnell Bradbury (Theatre), and Norman Hunt (Music). The Summer Number includes articles on Unity Theatre, Bolton's Theatre and Glyndebourne, and among the many illustrations are reproductions of pictures by such well-known painters as Meninsky and Victor Pasmore.

A THEATRE GUILD DISCUSSION

DURING the B.D.L. Conference at Liverpool an informal discussion was held on the subject of Theatre Guilds. Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth presided, and representatives of eight Guilds were present together with a large number of conference members.

Welcoming the delegates to the meeting Mr. Whitworth said the League had much sympathy with the formation of Theatre Guilds. Even before the present interest had manifested itself, there were many analogous local bodies, calling themselves "Federations," "Drama Associations," and so on. Some confusion arose where single societies called themselves "Guilds," and consequently the League recommended that the word Guild should only be used to describe a federation of smaller groups working together with a communal background.

Mr. Robin Whitworth suggested that it would be useful if details could be given as to what a Guild actually was, and how it was found to work best. Many people had come for such information.

Southampton Theatre Guild (Mr. Graham). This Guild was now in its third year. It could be broadly defined as a free association of groups of people interested in drama and kindred matters, bound together for their mutual betterment. One of their objects was to improve the general standard of amateur work. At present the Guild comprised 29 member groups, including the local Civic, Philharmonic and Operatic Societies. Two week-end schools and two non-competitive Festivals had been organised. Activities included a critics' panel, and a monthly magazine.

Sheffield Amateur and Dramatic Association (Miss Makin). After functioning for only 18 months, this Guild had 43 members. To raise money at the outset a joint production of "The Little Foxes" was given, a member of the cast being drawn from each society. A very high standard was thus reached as the cream of the city's amateur talent was at their disposal; yet the show had not been well supported. An annual joint production had been envisaged and to this end a meeting was called. The idea was not well received as members felt the Association would be taking their best players, thus interrupting their own productions. A Drama Festival had been held; the Association had a Library (a charge of 3d. per volume for postage being made), and information was exchanged about scenery and costumes. The

Guild would now like to know how to get into closer association with the League.

North London Theatre Guild (Mr. Bernard Whine). Established three years ago, this Guild has 32 member societies, but not more than half were keen members. London had so much else to offer that societies tended to consider themselves as social clubs, and the communal spirit was thus absent. The Guild fostered the idea that individual societies were part of a vast movement. Societies saw other people's productions and could also have the interesting experience of working with another producer. A panel of critics had been created, their criticism being accepted as a basis for discussion. An Annual Drama Festival had been organised and there had been two week-end schools with tutors recommended by the League. A Guild production was an annual event; and usually a play was chosen which could not ordinarily be done by a single amateur society; e.g. "Tobias," "The Witch," and "Our Town." A pool of scenery and properties had been started, but the idea of building up a library was temporarily discarded. Numerous loans had been made of furniture, individual pieces of scenery, etc. The Guild exchanged information and advice. Classes were not attended well, mainly because the Guild covered a vast area. There was a lack of support generally. The Guild was run by a Council each affiliated society being entitled to send two members.

West Lancs and West Cheshire Drama League (Mr. Gordon Douglas). Founded 17 years ago. There was great enthusiasm at the start. The Crane Theatre had been taken for whole weeks or single performances and Church halls were also used. It was thought that wealthy societies would be able to contribute greatly to the Federation, and that smaller Societies would require a lot from it. In the event, the large social communities in the town, who had so much to contribute, did not do so, and the smaller struggling societies were most individualistic and did not want anything from the Federation. A Library had been collected, but no one came to hire books. The Federation recently produced "Macbeth" and 4,000 to 5,000 school children had seen it. Under the auspices of Merseyside Civic Society they had held two or three Non-Competitive Festivals. Week-end Drama Schools had also been run. Merseyside Unity Theatre called a meeting with the object of establishing a small theatre and co-operation between

societies was discussed. A larger meeting was then called, from which emerged a strong Resolution that all Boroughs in Liverpool should be invited through their Education Authorities to throw open to amateurs some of the excellent halls and stages in the larger schools. Mr. Douglas said that, in his opinion, there was really no need for separate Guilds or Federations. The League was big enough to do all the work these Guilds could do.

Birmingham Amateur Dramatic Federation (Mr. W. Bushill-Matthews). Formed over 20 years ago. In its time all the things the newer Guilds were doing had been tried. One activity was a Junior Festival for Schoolchildren which was so successful that it had been taken over by the Local Education Authority. The Federation tried to support the professional theatre by organising theatre parties. At one time they had contracts with theatres wanting supers and people for crowd work. This was successful and remunerative, and the money thus earned considerably enhanced their funds. A Year Book was published with names and addresses of affiliated societies, dates of forthcoming productions and their aims and objects. The Guild's Library was destroyed in the blitz. "All Star" productions had been tried, i.e., taking the best of all the societies for Guild productions. This proved a bad thing; created a bad feeling and was bad for those chosen for the "all star" cast. They held a Festival Week during which the best plays produced throughout the season were shown, but it was not particularly successful. The B.D.L. Full Length Play Festival fills this need. Their Critics Panel filled a great need. Monthly Council meetings were held, consisting of one representative from each society and two individuals representing the Individual Members Section. Although some meetings were depressing, no one wanted to close the Federation down. Actually the main work was done by a few really keen individuals, only a very small percentage of the members taking any interest whatsoever. The Guild, however, did useful work as a sort of clearing house for amateur dramatic work in the district. A monthly News Letter was also published in which was made available information of the local work and of the work at the B.D.L. Headquarters. Mr. Bushill Matthews felt it was not desirable to set up a lot of little Drama Leagues. Their own Drama Schools would not have been possible without the League, but there were organisations openly getting inspiration from the League but who were not willing to give it any credit whatsoever.

Monmouthshire Drama League (Mrs. Powell).

This Guild had worked in close association with the B.D.L. since its inception. They had organised Summer Schools, advisory visits, etc. Every year they held a non-competitive drama Festival. Most of their societies were also members of the League. They had instances of Guilds formed without the help of the League which lived only a short time.

North Staffs W.E.A. (Mr. Scrimgeour). To some extent what had been said about Guilds seemed to strengthen the plea that they should, through the League, develop such activity all over the country in order to be able to negotiate with L.E.A.s for the kind of provision so desperately needed. Next year the L.E.A.s would be presenting to the Minister pleas for further education, and the Education Act of 1944 placed firmly on the shoulders of L.E.A.s the responsibility of providing for the cultural needs for the population within their area. Most L.E.A.s were fully aware of the needs in connection with Drama, but most of them were in the dark as to what exactly was required in the way of buildings and educational facilities. It would seem a very appropriate time for the members of the League in areas where Guilds had been formed to get together and exercise the right kind of pressure on the L.E.A.s to see that schools were open for the performances of plays and that educational provision was made.

Stockport (Mr. Johnson). In many ways the necessary provision could be met by existing County Committees. The usefulness of a Guild was in a sense opposed to that of County Committees, except in the question of the area covered. The County Committees covered larger areas, and a Guild could only operate successfully in small areas. What was wanted was a series of Guilds covering small areas, to work in the closest co-operation with the County Committee, where there was an urge to form a Guild. In an area only four or five societies might be affiliated to the League but others would be interested and helped by the formation of a Guild and so might become members.

Brighton Theatre Guild. This Guild was in its experimental stage. Before the war it held a large meeting for the purpose of forming a Guild. People were suspicious because they thought the intention was to steal their best players and form one big society. Their purpose now was to link dates of performances so as to avoid overlapping; to circulate leaflets so that other societies could attend performances, and to take steps to get exemption from Entertainment Tax. All profits were retained and put into their productions.

Mr. Whitworth said there was an immense

diversity in the form Guilds could and should take. It would be a good thing if Competitive Festivals run by Guilds could be brought within the ambit of the League's National Festival of Community Drama. This would add to the strength of the National Festival and to the interest of the local Festival. Guilds were right in spreading their net as far as possible and the League was justified in asking for reciprocity between Guilds and League. Local Guilds should encourage individual societies to join the League. There need be no overlapping between Guild and League and individual members of both bodies. In most of the rural counties we should be aware of the work that was being done by County Committees—some run by the League but many by Music and Drama Committees of the Carnegie Trust, and we should co-operate with these bodies. Many Education Committees were now affiliated to the League largely through our programme for Youth Clubs. The Guilds should therefore find it easy to get the support of L.E.A.s. It would be a good thing if the League atmosphere could be maintained within the framework of the Education Authorities. It might mellow the more official attitudes.

Mr. Bernard Whine suggested that the League might call together a Committee representative of Guilds to co-operate in their own activities and relate themselves to the League. Such a body might be composed of a nominee from each existing Guild, meeting once or twice a year.

Mr. Bushill-Matthews supported this suggestion and recommended the inclusion in the Conference next year of a short session set aside for Guilds and Federations.

The meeting agreed that a meeting of Guilds should be held before next Conference.

The Strand Electric and Engineering Company have issued a serviceable little booklet which they entitle "Some Advice on Stage Lighting." Without going into detail, the general principles of theatre illumination are cleverly set out, and many beginners in the craft of theatre illumination would find useful suggestions for improving their practice. The little book, which contains a preface by Emlyn Williams, may be obtained free from 24 Floral Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2.

Theatre Workshop will be at the Rudolph Steiner Hall in December and January with several items from their repertoire, which includes such plays as "Professor Mamlock" (Wolff), "The Proposal" (Tchekov) and "The Flying Doctor" (Moliere).

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

SUMMER SCHOOLS

THE August Summer School at Talbot Heath, Bournemouth, was attended by 120 students from all parts of the United Kingdom, and included groups from Capetown and Johannesburg, and a West African from the native University of Accra. Of these students about 60 were school teachers, the rest were youth leaders, instructors to adult drama groups, or members of dramatic societies.

The programme opened each morning with an out-of-door class in Expressive Movement conducted by Miss Betty Meredith Jones, Diplômée of the Laban School of Modern Dance. The latter part of each morning was devoted to group production classes. Mr. André van Gysegem took scenes from *The Beaux Stratagem* and the Documentary *Where Do We Go From Here?* Mr. Frank Newman's group studied Shakespeare; Miss Francis Mackenzie's group, scenes from modern plays including Shaw, Coward and Galsworthy; Mr. Eric Newton's group learnt how to handle improvised scenes with large numbers. In the evenings, each producer rehearsed a scene up to production point, the plays chosen being *Thunder Rock* (Act 2); *The Chester Morality Play of the Deluge*; *A City Not Forsaken*—a new play, on the lines of a historical documentary; and Gheon's *Christmas in the Market Place*.

The performances after a fortnight's rehearsal reached a remarkably high standard. In addition Mr. Edward Tapley's admirable demonstrations in setting and lighting were particularly appreciated. There were additional group classes in speech, make-up, property-making, and historical costume.

The September School, held at the Langdale Estate, Westmorland, was smaller in numbers and was run on rather different lines from the Bournemouth School. The course was designed for advanced students, and the sixty-eight who attended had been selected from a number of applicants. The school lasted only a week, and the emphasis was on intensive study of three full-length plays with a view to analysing their dramatic content and planning out the style and form of a production. The plays chosen were *Thunder Rock*, *Macbeth* and *When We Are Married*. The three professional producers were Mr. André van Gysegem, Mr. Frank Newman, and Miss Frances Mackenzie. At the school the students had the privilege of working under Mr. Rudolf Laban himself, assisted by Miss Lisa Ullman.

FRANCES MACKENZIE

THEATRE BOOKSHELF

"Affectionately Yours, Fanny," by Henry Gibbs. Jarrolds. 18s.

This is a theatrical history with a definite charm, and the charm is due to Fanny Kemble herself. The author has collected considerable information concerning the Kemble family and Fanny's own adventures, with their anxieties (including an unfortunate marriage) and public triumphs. But it is the copious extracts from her letters to Harriet St. Leger which make the book. Written in a light, rather girlish style, they display an intelligence far above the average woman of her day, with an overflowing sympathy with the poverty and injustice she met with on her travels. She heartily disliked the stage (this is not surprising when one remembers the turgid dramas in which she was forced to appear), and although adoring Shakespeare, she was happiest giving readings from the plays rather than appearing in mangled productions. Her eager observation rarely falters (the description of the opening of the Manchester-Liverpool railway is delightful), and her bright, lively nature must have been a stimulus to everyone who came in contact with her.

"Run Your Own Show," by D. Roy Mills. Rockliff. 8s. 6d.

An amusing little book on the production and management of revues, concerts, and light entertainment. The author is careful to emphasise the difference between shows of these kinds and a straight play; nevertheless, much of his advice would benefit producers everywhere. One or two statements read rather strangely ("the best time to start a dress rehearsal is about four hours before the performance," for example), but in general this is a useful little guide which most people, faced with a production, could read with profit.

"Speech Training as a Career," by Clive Sansom. Vawser and Wiles. 5s.

After a preliminary survey of the value of speech in modern life, this small book is mainly a detailed account of the various courses in speech training open to the student, with fees and average syllabus. Information is given on private teaching, day and evening schools and special appointments. The author considers that the prospects for a qualified teacher in this subject are excellent.

"Oscar Wilde and the Theatre," by James Agate. Curtain Press. 2s.

"J. B. Priestley and the Theatre," by Rex Pogson. Triangle Press. 2s. 6d.

"The Amateur and the Theatre," by Bonamy Dobré. Hogarth Press. 3s. 6d.

These three essays are interesting in various ways, but the one on Wilde is the most entertaining and illuminating, and a sad reminder of all we have lost by the death of James Agate. The weakness and strength of Priestley's plays are well brought out in the detailed summary by Rex Pogson, who, not unnaturally, seems to prefer most of the early work to the late. The Hogarth Essay, *The Amateur and the Theatre*, was originally a lecture given at the Civic Playhouse, Bradford. It contains valuable observations on the growth and purpose of the amateur, Mr. Dobré's thesis being that an amateur performance should be different in kind from a professional performance, but just as good in its own way.

"Love and Politics." Two plays by Charles Fenn. Wide World Press (no price given).

Charles Fenn is a British-born American journalist, and both his plays deal with the Far East. In *The Champion of the Truth* (7 m., 1 f., and others, 3 acts, 1 set) the scene is a Shanghai Chinese social club. Doubtless an accurate picture of present-day life in that city is given, but the action is involved and the fantastic machinations become tiresome. *Lillies That Fester* (3 m., 2 f., and others, 3 acts, 1 set) is better. Taking place in Indochina, during fighting between the French and the Annamites; the American doctor, the neurotic Therese, and an Annamite captain give conviction to the melodrama. In the preface a third world war is taken for granted.

PLAYS FOR CHILDREN

"Children's Theatre No. 5. Early Closing and Other Plays," by Cyril Swinson.

"Children's Theatre No. 6. Plenty of Fish and Other Plays," by Cyril Swinson. A. C. Black. 1s. 6d. each.

"Before the Cock Crowed on Christmas Morning," by Stella Mead. Sylvan Press. 2s. 6d.

"Good-night Bible Stories, Nos. 1 to 8," by Freda Collins. Mowbrays. 1s. 6d. each.

The Children's Theatre books are mainly intended for children of seven to ten. They are unpretentious, easy to follow, and give opportunity for all kinds of characterisation. Especially popular should be the *All Aboard* series (Book 6) which deals with a journey by bus, train, ship and aeroplane.

Before the Cock Crowed on Christmas Morning is a play for young readers and actors in three short acts and four scenes, with many characters. There is invention and a delicate sense of fantasy in every incident of this journey of Roger and Betty to Christmas Land and the Moon. *Good-night Bible Stories* cover the entire sequence of the New Testament narrative from the Nativity to Pentecost. Each episode is admirably told in simple and effective language. The stories in numbers 1 to 6 are easily adaptable for acting, and there are notes in the books showing how this can be done. Book 7, dealing with the Crucifixion omits these, and the last book is a history of the growth of the church.

ONE-ACT PLAYS

"*A Cameo from Cranford*," by Agnes Adam. Maclellan. 2s. (6 f.).
"Rainbow Dust," Mary Dunn. Maclellan. 2s. (1 m., 4 f.).
"*To-morrow's Vengeance*," by Stuart Ready. Deane. 1s. 6d. (2 m., 2 f.).
"*Two in the Bush*," by George Taylor. Matson. 1s. 3d. (1 m., 4 f.).
"*Wife Required*," by Falkland L. Cary and Philip King. Fox 1s. 6d. (1 m., 5 f.).
"*Elizabeth Refuses*," by Margaret Macnamara. Williams. 1s. 3d. (1 m., 4 f.).
"*A City Not Forsaken*," by Margaret Turner. Deane. 1s. 6d. (Many characters).
"*The Play of St. Lawrence*," by Clifford Bax. French. 2s. (6 m., 1 f., and others.)
"Seagull Plays." Second collection. Donaldson. 3s.
"*New Plays Quarterly*." Edited by John Bourne. Ryle, Ltd. £1 per annum.

Agnes Adam's "Cranford" extract has charm and humour, but might have been still more effective if the authoress had not endeavoured to compress so much of the novel into a short play. *Rainbow Dust* is a moving episode; wedding festivities in a Scottish tenement are in striking contrast to the recklessness of the "stairwasher" Maria. The melodrama *To-morrow's Vengeance* is not much more than a neat piece of construction, but it has its thrills, the last one unexpected. *Two in the Bush* is a simple little comedy of an attempt to bring a long courtship to some conclusion. But habit is too strong; Agnes and Albert remain as they were. *Wife Required* is a farce showing, with somewhat unequal humour, the strange assortment of women who arrive in answer to Henry Aspinall's advertisement for a wife. *A City Not Forsaken* endeavours to cover a large tract of history. We see the work of St. Hilda, Queen Elizabeth, Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry in a series of tiny episodes followed by visions. The

finale well sums up the message of the play and has definite beauty. *The Play of St. Lawrence* is written for production in churches, where, without doubt, it would be both forceful and moving. The various scenes have power and the martyrdom at the end is well suggested. *Elizabeth Refuses* now appears in a revised edition. It remains of the liveliest of the many adaptations from Jane Austen.

The second collection of Seagull Plays contains five Scottish plays, none of them without merit. *The Gailleach* (3 m., 3 f.) by Robert MacLellan is a tragedy of 1652 when Brodick Castle was garrisoned by British troops. Swift, sturdy action with a poignant ending. *Bedtime Story* (2 m., 2 f.), by Hugh Gilmour, is a somewhat feeble comedy of an elopement in 1850 ending in a family discussion. *Watch on the Clyde* (3 m.), by Avrom Greenbaum, in which Bob and Hughie grapple with a German prisoner, is undoubtedly amusing, but seems to have strayed in from the music halls. *Winds for Sale* (2 m., 1 f.), by J. Coleman Milton, is the best in the book. An old witch, her idiot son and a revengeful fisherman provide a sinister drama with a telling climax. *Two Kinds of People* (2 m., 3 w.), by Mary Dunn, is a moving study of a hardworking family to which the "gey wheedlesome" Sheila returns, but leaves at once in order that Kenneth may go back to the art school.

The first number of *New Plays Quarterly* presents five new one-act plays. Winifred Wall's *The Big Top* (4 m., 5 f.) takes place in a circus dressing tent. There is plenty of pathos, humour and excitement. A sudden tragedy occurs—but the show goes on. *Elizabeth in Love* (9 f.) is one more example of a type of play T. B. Morris has made his own. This study of Elizabeth's last folly, frustrated by her ladies-in-waiting, shows the author again at his best. *Strange Homecoming* (3 m., 3 f.), by Patricia Chown, is concerned with the casting out of an alien spirit, which has taken possession of a woman doctor, by a specialist in magic. Not a play for beginners. The atmosphere of *They Move On* (6 m., 6 f.) seems to be somewhat familiar (various people, lately dead, appearing before a Recorder at a "Celestial Clearing Station"), but the ending certainly strikes a new note which could hardly fail to be impressive. The last tiny piece is a dramatic exercise in movement and team work.

F. SLADEN-SMITH

"*The Duchess of Malfi*," by John Webster. Sylvan Press. 12s. 6d.

The Duchess of Malfi is a play of passion and horror; it must be seen and felt. To read it in a mood of quiet reflection is to see



Scene from "They Walk Alone," by Max Catto, as performed by the
Thespians Little Theatre Society, Wellington, New Zealand.

too clearly the incongruities which a modernised edition of the text so violently exposes. It is of its age, and to approach it from any other angle is to do it a disservice. In this edition, with its illuminating introductions by George Rylands and Charles Williams, the original spelling has been retained with enormous gain to the reader. As the editor so admirably expresses it, "it has an unruly vitality which our stereotyped correctness has lost"; the result is an edition which, at the first opening of the pages, sets the key in which the play can be read with pleasure. The impact of the tragedy is wholly on the emotions and there must be no impediment to the complete surrender of the reader. Only so can he accept, in the overwhelming flow of pity and terror which the play evokes. All students of the drama owe a debt of gratitude to the publishers of this admirable edition, and it is to be hoped that they may find it possible to bring out Webster's even greater tragedy, *The White Devil*, as a companion volume.

"The Government Inspector," by Nikolai Gogol. Sylvan Press. 12s. 6d.

Gogol's delightful comedy has been out of print for too long, and it is very pleasant to welcome it back in this new translation by D. J. Campbell. It is interesting to note that the play, with its satirical exposure of official corruption, might never have passed the censors had not the Tsar, to whom the MS had been shown, personally used his influence on its behalf. Once it was launched, the play established itself firmly as an outstanding contribution to Russian dramatic literature, but it is amusing to speculate what might have been its fate under a less liberal regime. The illustrations to this edition, by Robert Turner, add greatly to its attractiveness and should be helpful to producers in establishing the correct atmosphere of provincial Russia in the early part of the nineteenth century.

"Wives and Daughters," by Margaret Macnamara. Chas. H. Fox. (5 m., 10 f., 3 acts.)

Miss Macnamara's dramatisations of Jane Austen are well-known, and her new play, a delightful adaptation of Mrs. Gaskell's novel, will be equally popular. Humorous and tender, it has also the spice of satire, and less of the lavender and old lace quality of the better known "Cranford." The women have little of the "quaintness" of dear Miss Matty and her circle, and the men are allowed to take a very human share in the plot instead of being doomed to remain, romantically, apart.

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An interesting assortment of guests in a country inn on a wild, stormy evening provides the material for a thriller with several promising dramatic situations. The climax is unexpected but a little forced.

"Big Moment," by Norman Holland. (4 m., 2 f.)

The tragedy of a young boxer who is blinded in the fight which makes him a world champion. Good parts for the two women waiting to hear the result.

"The Black Cabinet," by Aubrey Feist. (2 m., 3 f., 2 sprs.)

Two young music-hall artists have an unnerving psychic experience of an event which has not yet taken place. Tense and exciting.

"Every Inch a King," by Joe Corrie. (4 m., 2 f.)

The last king left in the world rebels against the empty pomp and circumstance forced upon him by his ministers. The situations are humorous but the play is little more than a charade.

"The Fair and Lovely," by William Dinner and William Morum. (1 m., 5 f.)

Four women, each of whom has been tricked into marriage by Victor Brown, meet to celebrate their escape. The waiter joins in the discussion and they fail to recognise that he is Victor, slightly disguised. The treatment of the situation is scarcely farcical enough to cover its extreme improbability.

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"The Fourpenny Box," by Ian Hay. (7 m., 5 f.)

The accepted oracle and bibliophile in a quiet cathedral town is "exposed" as being unable to read or write, his famous readings from the classics being, in fact, recitations from memory. A touching and unusual theme, which might be even more effective as a short story than as a play.

"Happy as a King," by Gertrude Jennings. (1 m., 5 f.)

A pleasant absurdity about an exiled king who "arranged" a revolution to prevent his return to power. Can be recommended.

"In the Fog," by Gertrude Jennings. (4 f.)

A quiet suburb becomes suddenly the scene of violence and farcical misunderstandings. Miss Jennings shows here all her usual humours and accomplishments.

"The Inconstant Moon," by Philip Johnson. (2 m., 4 f.)

An old actress, living in poverty and a world of imaginary past triumphs, is offered £2,000 by a socially ambitious father if she will convince his stage-struck daughter that she has no histrionic talent. The bargain is struck but the true artist, long dormant in the old woman, recognises that the young girl has genius, and the curtain falls as she tears up the cheque which would have solved so many problems.

"The Little Nut-Trees," by T. B. Morris. (7 m., 5 f.)

A charming dramatisation of the familiar nursery rhyme of the King of Spain's daughter and the nut-tree.

"Master Dudley," by Philip Johnson. (1 m., 4 f.)

Dudley has been accused of the murder of two women but is acquitted at the trial and returns home, expressing complacent pleasure in the public interest which has been aroused. Before the curtain falls he has strangled his fiancee who has come to welcome him.

"Non Nobis," by Lake Aske. (1 m., 4 f.)

An attachment springs up between a dying man and one of the senior nurses in the hospital. Interest in the theme is weakened by too much irrelevant detail.

"Not According to Plan," by James Parish. (1 m.)

A hair-raising monologue in the Grand Guignol manner.

"The Prison Across the Street," by T. B. Morris. (3 m., 3 f.)

A famous torero, on his way to the bull-ring, does not undeceive his mother who accuses him of having committed the crime for which his brother has, rightfully been imprisoned. The situation is theatrical rather than dramatic.

"The Rose and Crown," by J. B. Priestley. (4 m., 3 f.)

In a London public-house, a mixed company, drawn with all Mr. Priestley's skill in characterisation, discuss the purpose of Life. The discussion ceases to be purely academic when a Stranger enters and reveals himself as the messenger of Death. Instead of making an arbitrary choice, he suggests that one of the company should volunteer to go with him and slyly indicates that, in view of their recently expressed opinions, they may welcome the opportunity.

"Sir Oliver's Heir," by Cyril Grainger. (6 m., 3 f.)

In this "sequel" to *The School for Scandal*, Sir Oliver plays another trick on his nephews and Lady Sneerwell is unmasked.

"The Spider Ring," by Mabel Constanduros and Howard Agg. (3 m., 3 f.)

A murderer who has already "disposed" of his first wife, is forestalled before he can kill her successor.

"Top of the Bill," by Stuart Ready. (3 m., 3 f.)

A music-hall comedienne tricks a fellow artist into a professional partnership and matrimony. Very funny and quite incredible.

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"At the Golden Ram." (6 m., 1 f.)

John, a young architect, is engaged to marry Anne, the inn-keeper's daughter, though her father doubts the wisdom of "marrying out of one's class." John scoffs at this point of view and we are shown him transported back to the year 1670, when he finds himself involved in a similar situation between Anne's ancestors, the inn-keeper of the period and Lord Trevanning's daughter.

"It Won't be a Stylish Marriage." (1 m., 4 f.)

Albert proposes but, when Daisy's Mama is approached, difficulties arise, and the mention of the famous bicycle made for two causes an attack of hysterics. Daisy discovers that she has a mind of her own and leaves her prostrate Mama to Albert's care, returning, when the uproar is at its height, neatly dressed in smart "bloomers," to announce that she is "ready."

"Princess Parker." (3 m., 2 f.)

Sonia Peranov, a pretty housemaid, the daughter of a Cockney barmaid and a mysterious foreigner, is visited by two distinguished strangers who proclaim her the heiress to the throne of Segovia. At first incredulous, then amused and thrilled, Sonia finally becomes alarmed when she sees that they are serious, and calls her policeman sweetheart to her aid. Albert

very quickly disposes of the deputation, and it is generally agreed that the sooner the Princess changes her name to Mrs. Albert Rowbottom, the better.

"Underground." (3 m., 1 f.)

The activities of a section of the underground movement are threatened by a spy. He is discovered in time and outwitted, and left to a horrible death. An exciting, and realistic play.

"Seventy-Three North." (3 m.)

Two men, manning a meteorological station in the Arctic, reach the stage when nerves are at breaking point and murder seems inevitable.

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"Beauty is Fled." (4 m., 3 f.)

"Maker of Roads." (6 m., 1 f.)

"St. Francis and the Wolf." (8 m.)

Paul Vincent Carroll writes very charmingly for children and his plays are simple without being condescending. The Celtic turn of phrase in his dialogue is especially effective in *Beauty is Fled*, the story of an impoverished toy-maker who will not part with the eight magic dolls into the making of which he has put all that he knows of beauty.

The St. Francis play deals amusingly with the non-plussed Town Council and the marauding wolf, who is made to see the error of his ways but whose repentance does not prevent his striking a very good bargain with the terrified Councillors. *The Maker of Roads*, an account of the conversion of St. Alban, seems to me a little stilted and difficult for children.

"The Maid was in the Garden," by Elena Mitoff, (3 m., 4 f.) French, 1s. 6d.

One of the five and twenty blackbirds pecks off the maid's nose and the King, finding it in the famous pie, returns it and falls in love with the owner.

"The Hole in the Sock," by Emily Sarter. (2 m., 6 f., supers). French, 1s. 6d.

The King, whose socks are in holes, offers his hand as reward to the princess who shall win a darning competition.

DOROTHY COATES.

At their Garden Party in June last, Queenswood School staged a Pageant, *Elizabeth and Hatfield*, which consisted of episodes from the history of Hatfield, including the visits of Henry VIII and Mary Tudor, and a play provided for the entertainment of Elizabeth in her captivity. The whole Pageant was voted a great success.



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AMATEUR SURVEY

UNIVERSITY DRAMA

Although Racine's "Athalie" is generally regarded as one of the world's great plays, it is seldom performed in England because of the inadequacy of existing translations. The *Leeds University Theatre Group* therefore commissioned a new translation by Kenneth Muir, a lecturer at the University, who has already translated several plays from the French. Because of the impossibility of naturalising the rhymed alexandrine, the translation is mainly in blank verse. The producer, Mr. G. Wilson Knight, is the author of several well-known books on Shakespeare, and has produced many plays in England and Canada. "Athalie" will be performed in the Riley-Smith Theatre from December 8th to 13th.

PLAYWRIGHTS

Recent chronicles of the *Sussex Playwrights' Club* read like a success story. In a one-act Play Competition organised by the Council of the Arts for Northumberland, one of their members won first place with "Waves Over Lindisfarne," while another member was the author of a pageant, "This Warrior Race," which was given at a Conservative Fete at Lewes recently. "Vanity Fair," an adaptation of Thackeray's novel by yet another member (Constance Cox) was released for repertory production in August and produced immediately by the Oldham Repertory Company, who gave the premiere of Miss Cox's first play "The Boy from Belfast."

In an effort to encourage playwrights of today, the *Sheffield Arts Club* are breaking new ground this season by launching a One-Act Play Competition. The Club, formed three years ago by Mary Dawes, has already given three plays not previously produced by amateurs in Sheffield—"The Women," "Evensong" and "The Virgin Goddess."

THEATRES IN VIEW

When the *Company of Ten* started in St. Albans in 1934 there was no drama, either professional or amateur, there. Since then, they have staged over 60 plays and reviews, and built up an audience some 2,000 strong. Their object is to found a theatre to hand over to the City, but so far no suitable building has been found. In October they presented "The Rose Without a Thorn" (Bax), to be followed in December by "Gas Light" (Hamilton), and in January by a review by Arthur Swinson "Here we Live." All members will then be engaged in the St. Albans Pageant fixed for June, 1948.

The *Four Seasons Club* founded in February,

1947, now has an acting membership of over forty. For the first year the proceeds of its plays will be earmarked for the Bromley and District Hospital, whom they are presenting with a mobile van for physio-therapy treatment and research. Subsequently, profits will be devoted to a fund for building a People's Theatre in South London. Their opening production was "The Mocking Bird," followed by "French Without Tears" in October. "Uncle Harry," "Ten Little Niggers" and "Rebecca" will be given in December, February and April. Lewisham Town Hall has been booked for the week commencing April 23rd next, for what is believed to be the first Amateur Repertory week on record, when on the six nights the Club will present a twice nightly programme with a different play each night.

GUILD NEWS

The *Sheffield Amateur Dramatic and Theatre Association* viewing its first Festival in retrospect, feels that though the standard of performance was not as high as could have been wished, the festival was an undoubtedly success and should become an annual event. Another Festival has therefore been planned for May, 1948. At the Second Annual General Meeting Mr. John Bourne gave a talk to member-societies and impressed on them the need for sincerity in their work. Future activities include a lecture on "Play Selection" by J. W. Marriott (November 25th), and a Week-end School in Production, Acting and Make-up (January 16th and 17th).

The recently formed *Bradford and District Theatre Guild* comprises 15 societies. One of their primary aims is to secure a Guild Theatre, and search is being made for a suitable building. An advisory panel of experts in production, lighting, make-up, etc., is to be set up, and the Guild is also aiming to get a scenery pool going as soon as possible.

In July last the *Medway Theatre Guild* presented, primarily for the benefit of local school children, "She Stoops to Conquer," at the R. E. Theatre Gillingham. Every effort was made to ensure a high standard, and the really charming costumes were seen to advantage against the background of a panelled set built by local amateurs. Priority bookings were offered to schools and Youth Clubs, and each performance was given to a crowded audience of delighted children.

THE NORTH-WEST

The Silver Jubilee of the *Penrith Players* finds them fundamentally the same in principle as when they first started. Yet their

activities now not only take a much larger place in Penrith itself, but have spread into the countryside for many miles around. Up to date, the Society has produced 80 one-act and 83 full-length plays. Last season's productions included "The Dover Road" (Milne), "Dark Tide" (Shepherd, and "Short Story" (Morley), while in April they broadcast "Father Cyprian" (Stewart Black) in the North Regional programme.

The *Liverpool Little Theatre* opened its 1947-48 season with "The Barretts of Wimpole Street," at the Crane Theatre. Their next production will be "The Little Foxes." Last season the Society introduced to Liverpool audiences the well-known American play "Stage Door," when £200 was taken for the Drapers' Trades' Association Charities. The final production of last season was "Quiet in the Forest" (Sylvaine) which had not previously been performed in Liverpool either by professionals or amateurs.

RURAL DRAMA

The activities of the *Mendip Players* were curtailed at the outbreak of war by the requisitioning of their home, the Byre Theatre, which was converted from a range of farm buildings in 1937. Before acquiring the theatre the Mendip Players toured villages and towns in the Wells neighbourhood. Miss Dorothy Garrett (founder and producer) and Miss Holwell (business manager) are now retiring, and the Byre Theatre Trust has been formed to carry on the work. The new director, Miss Anne Sheppard, has plans for extending activities at the Byre, including the establishment of a Drama School, a Children's Theatre and (perhaps) a Theatre Club in the New Year.

FESTIVALS

The Lewisham Borough Council held a Youth Festival Week in July, a Drama Competition being included in their programme, for which eleven societies entered. At the end the adjudicator, Mr. Robert Marsden, gave producers and actors much useful advice which should help in future productions. He awarded first prize to the *King's Own Players* for their presentation of "The Great Dark" (Totheroh), which was very well produced, considerable attention having been given to dramatic pauses, which gave the play added intensity. Lewisham has much to be proud of in her amateur talent, and in the organising powers of those responsible for arranging the Festival, which was successful in so many ways.

Considerable progress is being made in Nottingham in connection with the one-act Play Festival, and the City Education Authority is being most helpful. They have

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arranged with the owners of a new theatre which is being built for the Festival to be held for a week in March, if it is ready by then. Failing this, the Authority has promised the use of one of its own school halls.

The Wimbledon Community Association announce a Drama Festival in Wimbledon Town Hall on February 16th, 17, 23rd and 24th. Entries to be sent in not later than December 11th, 1947.

ROUND ABOUT LONDON

The Langdon Players (Essex) have just concluded a successful season of four plays: "Acacia Avenue," "Baa Baa Black Sheep," "Rebecca" and "Berkeley Square." To maintain the interest of those members who are inactive during rehearsals, a repertoire of one-act plays has been arranged which can be taken on tour to hospitals and villages where there is little entertainment. Since the Players' first post-war play in 1946 improvement has been made in production and new ideas have abounded. Not the least has been the introduction of background music, and all interval music is chosen with care so that it conforms with the humour of the play.

Tavistock Repertory Company's Autumn programme commenced on October 11th with "Beggar on Horseback" (Kaufman and Connally), a play which describes the nightmare experience of a young man who marries money. It is a gay, vigorous, yet absurd criticism of American Big Business. This was followed by "Music at Night," in which the clever use of music shows the minds of the characters. It has a high seriousness which is exceedingly moving. "The Doctor's Dilemma," starting on November 29th, is too well known to need any comment.

In June last the *Shepherdess Dramatic Society* presented "Ladies in Retirement" (Edward Percy and Reginald Denham) at the Cripplegate Theatre. A sincere and convincing performance of the play was achieved, which was obviously appreciated by the large audience. The cast was well-balanced and the team work excellent.

Although the *Fortmason Amateur Dramatic Society* has been formed only twelve months, they have already produced two shows, "The Blue Goose" and "Tony Draws a Horse," and started rehearsals for "Marry at Leisure." In October they gave two performances of "Blue Goose" at the Scala in aid of the Mayor of Westminster's Fund for Merchant Seamen.

MAGAZINES AND BULLETINS

"*Ancillia*," the quarterly journal of *The Ancillians* of Bedford Park was first issued when this all-women society was barely six months old. Started in November, 1946,

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the Company produced a series of one-act plays, including a Christmas miracle play, under the title "Christmas Fare," in the following January. Their next production in October was "Star in Eclipse" by Dorothy Williams. Already they have doubled their membership, and a link with the professional stage has been made through their President, Miss Betty Shaw.

The September number of the "Highbury Bulletin," the magazine of the *Highbury Players* gives the news that a Little Theatre Guild is to be formed in Birmingham to co-ordinate amateur dramatic activities in the City. The Bulletin also congratulates the Birmingham Repertory Theatre on falling into line with those theatres which do not permit smoking in the auditorium during performances. (In passing, it may be remembered that at a recent broadcast of the Theatre Brains Trust on the Light Programme, the abuse of smoking in theatres was vigorously attacked.) A new feature at Highbury is a "Third Programme," an experiment to set aside one production each season frankly intended for a specialised audience.

Glasgow Citizens' Theatre "Bulletin." When in August the Theatre gave the world premiere of "John Knox" (Bridie), visitors to the Edinburgh Festival travelled specially to Glasgow to attend. This was followed by "Wild Horses" (Valency) and "An Inspector Calls" (Priestley). The Company are visiting Ayr, where they will open a six-weeks' season at the Gaiety Theatre on November 3rd. A special season of Irish plays starts on November 3rd at the Citizens Theatre with "They Got What They Wanted," which will be presented by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, with the original cast. Another interesting event at Glasgow will be the visit of the Pamela Stirling French Players who, by arrangement with the Glasgow Department of Education, will give three matinees entirely for school children.

The September number of *Merseyside Unity Theatre* "Bulletin" reports that this society have formed a mobile group which is building up a repertoire of short plays, sketches, song scenes, etc. Regarding choice of dramatic material, the Bulletin says that previously they have turned to the achievements of the past, but they feel we must also turn to the common people of today as the rich earth from whence contemporary culture can spring. There was no need to be afraid of plays which take sides on political issues, as such plays need not be less truthful or artistic than a medieval religious play or an Elizabethan chronicle play.

DORIS HUTTON

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CHILDREN'S THEATRE?

For its fourth production the Children's Theatre presented *The Immortal Lady*, commencing at Toynbee Hall on September 29th. This was a beautiful production of a fine play, well acted and charmingly dressed, but one wondered whether it was a suitable choice for audiences of school children, and if Mr. Clifford Bax's sophistication was not more likely to appeal to the adult taste. It is true that the children laughed uproariously when the butler, who had been told to go to hell, said "Very good, Sir," and they were amused by George I's guttural English, but the subtleties of Mrs. Mills's wheedling ways and feigned hysterics, though admirably played, seemed to pass them by completely. At the performance the writer attended there was shuffling and general restlessness at such points. And what, after all, are children to make of a remark, attributed to Walpole, who was supposed to have talked obscenity from the fish to the walnuts : "In miscellaneous company I always talk obscenity. 'Tis the only topic in which every man is able to join on an equality." It seems we still await a Theatre which both caters for children's tastes and at the same time inspires them with a love of the living theatre before they are lost entirely to the Cinema.

D. H.

OLDHAM LYCEUM DRAMA CLUB

The dramatic section of the Lyceum Education and Literary Club has been active for about fifty years, and now possesses its own Little Theatre in the building of the parent society. The first play of the current season was Geoffrey Whitworth's *Haunted Houses*. "We have had an excellent show" writes the producer, Mr. Gerald Yates, "full houses and, so far as we can tell, the play has set the standard we want—a good, sound production, well played, and a play of merit outside the conventional week by week rep. productions."

AN UNIQUE OCCASION

An event in this, the Diamond Jubilee, year of the London Federation of Boys' Clubs is to be a performance of Barrie's play *The Boy David*, in which the name part will be played, for the first time in London by a boy.

Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret has graciously consented to attend the performance which will be given at the Scala Theatre on Tuesday, December 2nd.

Further particulars from the London Federation of Boys' Clubs, 223 Blackfriars Road, S.E.1.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMATEUR CRITICS

Dear Sir,

We ask for some of your valuable space on behalf of the Council of the Guild of Drama Adjudicators, to express the misgivings with which it views the Critic's Panel advertised in *The Amateur Stage*. This Panel appears to consist of people unknown outside their own locality, and presumably amateurs themselves, who offer to give free criticism of performances. There is obviously no objection to amateurs telling one another what they think of their work: this might be a salutary practice. But *The Amateur Stage* presents the service so as to give the impression that this is expert criticism, comparable to that delivered by an experienced adjudicator. Such an impression is detrimental to the whole standard of amateur dramatic work, since teams receiving it will either be dissatisfied by the criticism given or get a false idea of its value. It tends to destroy the basis on which adjudication is built, and to defeat the ends for which the British Drama League has for many years been striving: and we urge that it should be corrected as widely as possible.

Yours faithfully,

E. Martin Brown, *Chairman*,
C. B. Purdom, *Secretary*,
Guild of Drama Adjudicators.

56 Portland Court,
Great Portland Street, W.1.

ELEANORA DUSE

Dear Sir,
I am preparing a biography of Eleanora Duse, and would be most grateful if anyone possessing letters, anecdotes, personal reminiscences, or any literature concerning her would get in touch with me at the address below. The greatest care will be taken of all documents placed in my possession.

Yours sincerely,
Kay Hammond

Clarendon House,
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COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, December 3rd, at 3.30 p.m. at
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EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

A Southerner's View

OUT of this year's Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama emerges one significant item of news; another Festival is planned for three weeks next year (August 22nd—September 11th). Therefore the organisers must feel sufficiently confident of this year's success; and well they might be!

It is freely admitted that the 1947 plans for Drama were not particularly imaginative nor original. Indeed, one may see elsewhere the Old Vic company in *Richard II* and *The Shrew*, the Sadlers Wells Ballet in *The Sleeping Beauty*, The Pilgrims Players in *Family Reunion* and *Murder in the Cathedral* without incurring the considerable expense of money and time to visit Edinburgh. For the first year, however, it would have been artistically as well as financially speculative to embark upon entirely new productions.

Full praise is, therefore, especially deserved for bringing the Companie Jouvet de Théâtre del' Athénée to the Lyceum during the last week of the Festival. This truly justified the nomenclature "International." It is hoped that in the future emphasis upon the international aspect will not be forgotten, and that the understandable desire of the less broadminded Scots to specialise in the work of native dramatists and actors will not be allowed to prevail.

The magnificence and hospitality of The Festival Club, The Exhibition of Theatrical Design at International House, the varied lectures organised by the Festival Society and Unity Theatre Society, the Lanchester Marionette Theatre, Richard Ainley in *Everyman* at Dunfermline, all contributed to this feast of Drama which has not been submitted upon such a scale ever before in Great Britain within living memory. To add to other delights which this glorious city of Edinburgh has offered, must of course be recalled the contributions of the Amateur Theatre as represented by The S.C.D.A., Glasgow Unity, and the Christine Orr Players in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Upon the minute stage of the Y.M.C.A. it was a courageous task to present such a mighty tragedy. The production for this reason was notable, and the costumes designed by Christine Orr herself most imaginative and resourceful.

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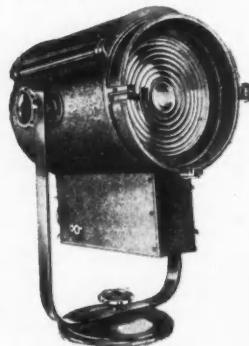
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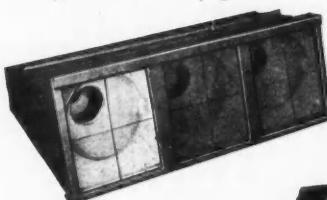
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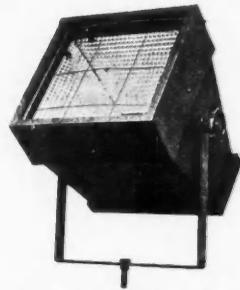
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